

Worship For Sunday 8th August 2021 (Rev Paul Saunders)

*Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.*

Psalm 95: 1-2

You have probably noticed that the Olympics are currently taking place in Tokyo. Our worship today is inspired by them.

[Hymn 407 StF Hear the call of the Kingdom - Read the words, or click this to listen](#)

We come to worship as we are, known by God and called by name.
We come with our doubts and our fears to a Lord who knows doubt and fear too.
We come, weary and weighed down, to the Spirit who breathes new life into us
and sends us on our way rejoicing. Amen.

Readings

Hebrews 12: 1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

When I was at school, I really enjoyed sport. In the winter we played rugby and in the summer it was a mix of cricket and athletics, and I thoroughly enjoyed all of them. Unfortunately, the horrible truth is that I was no good at any of them, but I did try. I did briefly make the school team for athletics, throwing the discus and putting the shot, but I had no delusions of grandeur, and I never won anything. I think the truth is that although I enjoyed sports I lacked two key things, talent, and the willingness to apply myself to that discipline to the exclusion of other things.

When I watch something like the Olympics, I am in awe of the competitors, not just for their performance, but for their dedication and their ability to focus all their lives on achieving their goals. The cost of their sacrifice is something that ultimately only they will know, though thankfully some now feel able to share the strains that they suffer.

It is difficult to identify ourselves with elite athletes, yet the two Bible passages above liken our Christian lives to a race. Hebrews tells us to run with perseverance, whilst in 2 Timothy

Paul reflects on his life as a well fought fight and a race completed. Are we called to be "elite Christian athletes"?

Let us consider another parallel. This year's London Marathon is set to have a record 100,000 runners, and let's be honest, only about ten of those will fancy their chances of winning. So, are the other 99,990 wasting their time? Not at all, because each of them will be running their own race, perhaps to improve their time, or to raise as much money for charity as they can, or simply to prove to themselves that they can do it. There will be thousands of winners in that race.

And this is the key in Hebrews 12:1, "let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,". God sets before each of us a course for us to run, and our course will be unique to us. Success lies not in being better than others, but in being faithful to God in the tasks He calls us to. In 2 Timothy Paul does not claim to have won the fight or the race, rather to have completed them to the best of his ability.

Let us each then seek the course that God has planned for us, and run the race to the best of our ability, that in doing so we may serve and glorify God

[Hymn 254 StF Seek ye first the kingdom of God - Read the words or click to listen](#)

Prayer of Intercession

Let us pray for all people, in all parts of this troubled world, and in all kinds of need. Lord, shine your light upon those who live in danger of violence, persecution, oppression, displacement, loss and injustice because of race, belief, gender or who they are. We pray that the hearts of those who visit the evils of prejudice and greed upon others may be turned from darkness and awakened to the true light in the love and compassion of the Lord.

Lord, shine your light upon those who live in fear of famine, disease, and destitution, and upon those who live without hope, faith, or love, that they may know your true love and the joy of your salvation.

Lord, shine your light upon your church and upon all people of faith that their love may shine in the darkness, uniting in their endeavours for the common good. May we, in the ministries which are our lives, proclaim the Good News as our faith shines forth.

Lord, shine your light upon those who suffer in mind, body, or spirit, and those who mourn. Give them courage and hope in their troubles and bring them the joy of your redeeming love. We pray also for those who love and care for them.

We ask these prayers in and through the name of Jesus, Amen

[Hymn 410 StF Lord Your church on earth is seeking - Read the words or click to listen](#)